Refracting ritual:
An Upside-down Perspective on Ritual, Media and Conflict

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The contributors to this volume have gone out of their way to make their intellectual lives difficult. In tackling the interplay of ritual, media and conflict, they have taken on a humanities equivalent of the unresolved "three body problem" in celestial mechanics: how to compute the mutual gravitational interaction of three masses. Getting a grasp on the ritual-media-conflict question, however, is complicated in a typically terrestrial, social sciences way. The bodies in question, far from being well-defined physical objects, are conceptual constructs, derived from the analysis of empirical events whose very nature is subject to debate. In the course of the project's history the contributors entertained a wealth of partially contradictory propositions and queries: "Ritual resolves conflict." "Ritual disguises conflict, thereby amplifying it." "Mediatizing conflict spreads it." "If mediatization escalates, does ritualization follow suit, or does ritualization decline?" "When ritual and media interact, how do the patterns of conflict change?" Such questions attest to the novelty and far-reaching character of their joint adventure but also to the conceptual difficulties it involves.

It is hardly surprising that Grimes' generous, even-handed introduction is largely devoted to unpacking the complex issues raised by these alternative touchstone statements, so as to better stake out a middle ground between improvable generalities and ethnographic truisms. While tracing the project's collaborative history, he is mainly concerned with making explicit some of the authors' shared presuppositions regarding ritual, media, conflict, and the connections among them. The contributors are less preoccupied with identifying the boundaries of these concepts than in describing their interrelationships. However, as Grimes recognizes, definitional issues can not simply be ignored, and addressing them will allow me to add my own two cents to the mix ("We're not just looking for polite words" was Grimes' admonition when inviting me to write this afterword).

Conflict

"Conflict" plays a somewhat special, all-encompassing role in this collection. It is at once the most pervasive and least conceptualized of the title's three terms. Dispute intervenes mostly as a context, as the regrettable yet recurrent state of affairs providing empirical situations in which ritual and media come into play. Precipitated or acted upon by one or the other or both, conflict's own distinctive properties remain largely unexamined. In short, conflict in these contributions intervenes more as a backdrop than as a "body."

One partial exception is described in the introduction and appears in several of the essays. A model of conflict advanced by sociologist Philip Smith holds that the essence of violent dispute (war being the prime example) is ritual, conceived as the source of an unquestionable polarization that sets a positively connoted "us" in opposition to a negatively weighted "them." As Grimes remarks, this view relies on an overly narrow understanding of ritual as "the mobilization of cultural symbols in the service of a sacralized we/they dualism." Alternatively, it implies an abusively comprehensive understanding of ritual as equivalent to symbolic practice in general. Following Gregory Bateson, for example, one might argue instead that polarization is an intrinsic, potentiating feature not of ritual but of conflict. From

this standpoint, one should expect the discursive, iconic, and enacted representations called upon to advocate and justify the escalation of dispute, to make ample use of conflict's tendency to give rise to polar opposites. Such representations may include ritual events, but this is not necessarily the case. Thus, when Smith speaks of ritual (as opposed to instrumental) motivations for fighting, I would say that he is really speaking of something much broader, namely symbolism.

While the idea that symbolic polarizations are necessarily instances of ritual is highly debatable, it does have the merit of underscoring the fact that conflict and ritual are in no way antithetical. Indeed, one of the originalities of this collection is its insistence, "We do not assume that conflict is necessarily bad any more than we assume that ritual is always good." Thus, while recognizing that "ritual may be a means for peace-making," the contributors have chosen to concentrate "on ritual as a factor in conflict rather than as a means for resolving it."

Old ideas die hard, however, and many of the papers' analyses are implicitly built on the idea that conflicts are better resolved and that ritual has a role to play in this process. This important issue deserves clarification. The distinctive efficacy of ritual does not reside in its ability to provide answers to problems raised by social life. At best, it recontextualizes particular predicaments in a way that allows answers to be sought more easily elsewhere, by means of the myriad resources humans have at their disposable: intimidation, seduction, logical reasoning, secrecy, story-telling, negotiation, bluff, and so forth. On the other hand, ritual is particularly apt at transmitting certain fundamental questions in the light of which social life, including the problems it entails, may be defined. Ritual does not so much clarify identities or set things straight as it perpetuates, in a way that makes them particularly difficult to deny, the mysteries and unresolved issues that we hold dear. In other words and stated more positively, ritual promotes the ongoing relevance of certain axiomatic cultural values and ideas by packaging them, along with their attendant ambiguities and contradictions, in the form of somewhat enigmatic, yet highly memorable, enactments that are hard to argue with. Thus, while rituals are often occasioned by disputes or precipitated by transformative events in which unsettled concerns come to the fore, they remain decidedly ambivalent with respect to the resolution of these issues. Although they act to redefine particular contentions, at the same time, they corroborate and sustain the conceptual and relational grounds from which these contentions arise. In this way, ritual does somewhat less than what we might like to believe. However, what it does do, it does better than most anything else: provide an authoritative basis for the establishment, persistence, and incremental transformation of traditions geared to the organization of embodied action.

It is worth stressing that there are at least two clear advantages to having chosen conflict as a field of investigation. The first is that it anchors academic speculations regarding ritual and media to immediate, widely shared pragmatic concerns. The second is that it simplifies analysis in a realistic rather than purely logical fashion, thereby paving the way for fruitful comparison. Because of conflict's polarizing tendencies, the widely varying case studies can be easily grasped as organized around issues having essentially two sides.

Ritual and Ritualization

In arguing for the specificity of ritual as a particular mode of symbolic practice with distinctive potency, I come up against what is perhaps the key concept in many of these papers: ritualization. Indeed, the contributors speak of "ritual" but mostly of "ritualization," thereby focussing attention on how events may be said to acquire certain ritual-like characteristics. This approach, as explicated by Grimes in his introduction, draws on a series of features that, while not definitive of ritual, are often associated with it. Ritual is deemed to

be, among other things, “embodied, enacted, spatially rooted, temporally bounded, prescribed, formalized, and repeated or singularized.” These are the qualities that are held to characterize ritualization. To the extent that they are present to a greater or lesser degree, a given activity may be said to be more or less ritualized. Thus, recapitulates Grimes, “No activity is a ritual, but any action can be ritualized.” From a methodological point of view, this perspective is both appropriate and highly productive. Much of the material presented in this volume would be excluded if a stricter, more static conception of ceremonial activity were adopted. To be able to envisage works of art, acts of public vandalism, encounters over the Internet, protest marches, and political torture as instances of ritualization casts them in a new, unexpected light, allowing certain heretofore neglected aspects of these phenomena to come to the fore. However, every conceptual choice worth its salt has a price to pay, and it is useful to tease out exactly what that price is.

The problem is that “ritual,” as distinct from “ritualization,” doesn’t seem to go away. This ambiguity is present for example when the latter notion is first introduced: “Ritualization, that is, activities which display fewer of the qualities normally associated with ritual.” Normally associated by whom? Also, consider the following: “A ritual is what happens when someone notices ordinary ritualization and then compresses, reframes and enacts it.” The key word in this just-so story is “reframes,” which is a somewhat circular short-hand for “reframes as ritual,” to be understood as that which makes “ordinary ritualization” recognizable as an instance of non-ordinary ritual enactment. The question remains: Who is doing the noticing and the reframing? The answer would seem to be that it is the actors themselves: “ritualization,” says Grimes, “refers to the process of increasing the extent to which something is pushed in the direction of socially recognizable ritual.” Similarly, Binder, Driver, and Stephenson, while strenuously arguing in their contribution that torture is ritualized violence, nonetheless consider that “The principal reason it would be awkward to call torture ritual is that there is no cultural understanding of it as ritual.” Thus, while “ritualization” is defined theoretically as the greater or lesser presence of particular qualities (embodied enactment, spatial and temporal delimitation, prescription, formality, and so forth), “ritual” is treated as a local (that is, ethnocentrically grounded) concept whose nature and extension vary from one cultural tradition to the next. In short, there is no such thing as “ritual” in general. However, I suspect, and Grimes’ own formulations bear witness to this, that at least some of the contributors (I count myself among them) are less than satisfied with the impoverished, atomistic understanding of ritual that this position implies: ritual as a fuzzy set of typical features. Many of them, while espousing, in principle, a family-resemblance strategy that renders any distinction between “ritual” and “ritualization” superfluous, nonetheless hesitate to abandon this discrimination altogether, hence the feeling that beneath the surface of the analytical perspective adopted in this volume is the unacceptable desire to have one’s ritual cake and eat it too.

The difficulty is that the alternative to this position also has its problems. To begin with, as Grimes shows, there is a variety of theoretical definitions of ritual to choose from. But more importantly, whatever the definition chosen, to the extent that ritual is held to be distinct from ritualization, the latter loses its tight connection to the former, regardless of how it is locally framed. Ritualization may be regarded as being like ritual, as evocative of ritual, as a metaphor for ritual, or what have you, but it is pointedly not ritual. While such a stance may be close in spirit to that taken by some of the contributors, it weakens the volume’s overall argument considerably.

Trying to get out of this dilemma is daunting. As I see it, two things are required. On the one hand, it is necessary to provide a substantive account of ritual that, while sufficiently discriminatory, is able to subsume certain practices that depart significantly from canonical ceremonial forms. On the other hand, it is necessary to provide the grounds for an organic link

between ritual and ritualization such that ritualization becomes simply the process whereby ritual is put into effect. This is fairly close to the approach favoured by Grimes, but entails turning his proposal on its head: I'm looking for a conceptual framework in which "ritualization" is soluble in a well-defined notion of "ritual" rather than the other way around. Let me briefly try to outline in the following two sections what such an upside-down framework might be.

Ritual as a Mode of Participation

Ritual, as Grimes remarks, is not a "thing" or even an event, but a way of partaking in an event. To springboard off Jonathan Z. Smith into more (inter)action-oriented waters, we might say that ritual is a particular way of paying attention to what one is doing (with others).[1] It thus pertains to the nature of the connection, as experienced by participants, between the actions they undertake and their intentional and emotional dispositions. This connection can take different forms, each of which may be said to define a particular mode of participation. One of these modes of participation, I suggest, is "ritual." In ritual, participants' attention is focused less on how their actions may be construed as expressing their personal attitudes, feelings and beliefs than on how their attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be informed by the accomplishment of certain actions.

In this perspective, "ritual" is less a category of behaviour than one among several possible pragmatic presuppositions that tacitly or explicitly govern peoples' participation in particular events. Another mode of participation is "spectacle" in which, as in ritual, participants' attention is directed at how attitudes, feelings and beliefs are affected by the performance of certain actions; however in this case, it is not the performer's own intentional and emotional dispositions, but those of others, which are purported to be affected by the actions undertaken. Still another mode is "play," in which participants' actions *are* taken to express their personal feelings and motivations, all the while being pursued in conformity with what are perceived to be certain out-of-the-ordinary conventions. These different modes of participation are often combined in various ways.[2] They can be juxtaposed to each other or embedded within each other; they can oscillate from one mode to the other, and so forth. Indeed, the underlying idea of the model I am proposing is that most empirical events are not pure instances of any particular mode, but composite configurations giving rise to distinctive emotional, intentional, relational, and esthetic effects.

In any given performance, the ritual mode of attention is embraced by those concerned to a greater or lesser degree. Not only are some individuals less attentive to what they are doing than others, but what is resolutely ritual for some may be intuitively experienced by others as spectacle, play or something else entirely. Moreover, an individual's mode of participation may vary in the course of the enactment. At the same time, however, the practical exigencies of ongoing coordinated interaction tend to minimize such disparities, orienting participants' perceptual and performative expectations along parallel lines. From this point of view, ritual, as one among a number of organizational principles governing the perception and patterning of social activity, is best understood a statistical phenomenon not unlike a mathematical "attractor". In other words, ritual is a stable pattern of probabilities in the distribution of participants' attentiveness within a field of possible modes of participation. To qualify an enactment as "ritual" or "ritualized" thus amounts to the same thing. It is to entertain the hypothesis that the actors participate in this enactment by tacitly or explicitly attending to how their personal attitudes, feelings and beliefs may be affected by their performance of certain actions. To speak of an event as "a ritual" is to estimate that this

pragmatic presupposition is adopted by the participants in such a systematic fashion as to approach the theoretical limit of absolute ritualization.

We do not have direct access to how people attend to what they are doing. For this reason, and in order to avoid basing our analysis on local categorical schemes, analytical hypotheses and estimates regarding the ritualistic character of particular events, while fueled by the utterances of those involved, are founded on properties of the events themselves. Ritual is potentially present in any situation. However, what Don Handelman has called the "design features" of certain events favour a ritual mode of participation more readily than others.[3] Among these features is the use of distinctive designations, the evocation of authorities, as well as the morphological traits identified by Grimes (spatial and temporal delimitation, formality, repetition, etc.). All these features are concomitant qualities of ritual, ones that often contribute to the emergence and the persistence of ritual activities, but which are not, strictly speaking, definitive criteria.

Foremost among these design features is the incorporation of a measure of structural indeterminacy or complexity that endows lived-through performance with a degree of self-reference, making it difficult for participants to make sense of what they are doing in other than ritual terms, that is, as exceptional enactments, meaningful in and of themselves, whose presumed significance is accessible solely by means of their performance. I have argued elsewhere that a privileged wellspring of such complexity is "ritual condensation," in which the simultaneous actualization of nominally contrary forms of relationship gives rise to highly evocative items of behaviour that are difficult to account for in terms of everyday intentionalities and patterns of relationship.[4] This feature is indeed typical of events that anthropologists readily recognize as rituals, in which, for example, affirmations of identity are at the same time testimonies of difference, displays of authority are also demonstrations of subordination, the presence of persons or other beings is at once corroborated and denied, secrets are simultaneously dissimulated and revealed, and so forth.

Recent work on contemporary Western ceremonial however, has prompted me to envisage another recurrent source of structural indeterminacy favouring a ritual mode of attentiveness. It relates less to the organisation of the actions undertaken than to the definition of the agents who undertake them, that is, the participants themselves.[5] Taking this further design feature into account will allow us to envisage some of the cases in this volume in a new light.

Ritual Refraction

Consider the following examples, taken, respectively, from Salomonsen and Danforth:

> In the course of her "first blood" ritual, largely designed by one of her mother's friends, Sonia, wearing a long hooded robe and carrying a basket of flowers, is led into the centre of a circle formed by the participating women dressed in red. Standing close together, they "teach [her] who the Goddess actually is" by repeatedly singing: "Listen, listen, listen to my heart's song; I will never forget you, I will never forsake you; I will always love you, I will always be with you". [6] For the participants, I suggest, this performance does not so much proceed from their own private feelings and beliefs as it expresses the sentiments and convictions of beings (Orphic priestesses? Amerindian sagewomen?) deemed wiser and more natural than themselves whose attitudes they seek to emulate and whose ceremonial footsteps they do their best to follow. However, as the scene ends, each of the participants finds herself to be

> deeply affected: "For a long time [Sonia] only stares down at her feet. But we continue to sing, and after a while she raises her head, as if the spirit moves her to a place of strength. She then looks calmly into our eyes, one by one, as she slowly turns clockwise in the circle. To watch this shift from shyness to calm and conscious eye contact is a moving experience, and some of the women, including her mother, start to weep […]".[7]
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> During Ken Cadigan's firewalking workshop, participants are led through a six hour long preparatory process that allows them to get in touch with their inner "fire of the heart" and to "be open to who [they] are" so as to be able to confront and overcome "fear and limiting beliefs." This involves praying, dancing, chanting, listening to stories and lectures, talking to oneself ("My intention is to have a healing experience"), "speaking from the heart" about oneself to others, visualizing one's desires, writing down what one wishes to abandon to the fire, etc. Having thus revealed this unsuspected potential within themselves, the participants are ready to walk through the fire: "Let the coals invite you. Go in when you feel a big 'yes' in your heart." Their doing so is in large part upheld by a concerted effort on their part to become "extraordinary," that is, something other than what they usually feel themselves to be. However, it is as "ordinary" individuals that they come off the hot coals deeply moved, hugging each other and cheering "Yeah! All right! Way to go!".[8]

Enactments such as these are predicated less upon ritual condensation than upon what we might call "ritual refraction." The participants' personal attitudes, feelings and beliefs are presumed to be affected by performances that do not consist in the pursuit of conventionally stipulated forms of behaviour, but instead follow from an equally conventional emulation of what are held to be exemplary emotional and intentional qualities, often ascribed to non-Western, pre-Christian, or still more exotic others (Native-American shamans, Celtic priestesses, Ascended Masters, etc.) or to more authoritative aspects of the participants themselves (one's inner child, one's spiritual self, the Goddess within, etc.). In other words, these rituals are organized less around the performance of archetypal actions, as discussed by Humphrey and Laidlaw,[9] than around the instantiation of archetypal agencies defined by a set axiomatic intentional and emotional dispositions. Correlatively, the potency of these practices relates not to the special, mysterious character of the actors' behaviour, but to the exceptional, equally mysterious qualities taken on by the actors themselves. Indeed, ritual enactments such as these give rise to enhanced, refracted subjects spanning several contrary identities at once: the archetypal agencies the participants seek to emulate and the participants affected by the performances deriving from this emulation. The structural uncertainty intrinsic to this situation pertains not so much to what exactly is being done – typically, the actions carried out are rendered readily intelligible (by analogy for example) in terms of everyday patterns of motivation and interaction – as to who exactly is doing it.

There are three particularities of identity-refracting ritual enactments that contrast markedly with more canonical ceremonial performances. First of all, self-conscious innovation and creativity are considered to be a necessary, pivotal feature of such practices, essential to their effectiveness. Existing or imagined religious traditions are taken to provide not models to follow but resources to be inventively explored with a view to their personalization, that is, their adaptation to the peculiarities of the situation at hand and the sensibilities of those involved. Thus, the practitioners' overriding concern is not to replicate antecedent ceremonies but rather to recapture, in themselves and in the performances they create, the spirit in which such ceremonies are presumed to have been performed.

Secondly, ritual enactments of this type are designed to be reflexive, the participants being made to relate to images, utterances, and somatic sensations that participants themselves deliberately generate. Such reflexivity is an essential feature that prevents the two opposing aspects of the participants' ritually engendered identities from collapsing into one. Thus, without calling their exceptional nature into question, many practitioners insist on the metaphorical significance of their performances, and few would maintain, for example, that they simply are, unequivocally, an Ascended Master or a Native-American shaman.

This reflexivity is also closely connected with a third feature, the extensive use of immaterial props or devices. In more classical ceremonial events, ritual relationships among participants and between participants and non-human entities are generally, if not always mediated by the manipulation of objects whose very physicality provides these difficult-to-grasp relationships with intention-laden material grounding. Here, however, although objects may be involved, the emergence of ritually constructed subjects is often mediated by immaterial representations that favour the ambiguities that these refracted identities bring into play. "Visualisation" or "creative projection" in which participants are affected by intangible, virtual performances largely of their own making, is a prime example of this.[10]

Personalized creativity, self-aware reflexivity, and the prevalence of immaterial representations, then, are among the concomitant characteristics of what I suggest is a largely under-theorized type of ritual activity.[11] As in all instances of ritual, the participants attend to how their pursuit of certain behaviours may impact upon their personal feelings, attitudes, and beliefs. The behaviours in question, however, rather than standing on their own (as archetypal actions), occur as actualizations of exemplary intentional and emotional qualities that are felt to be different from those of the individual participants who strive to emulate them. Participants are presumed to be affected by performances deriving from their attempt to assume these axiomatic qualities. Taking this refractive process into account should allow us to appreciate some of the events described in this book not as ritualized in the sense of having a number of ritual-like features (spatial and temporal delimitation, formality, repetition, etc.), but as enactments governed by the pragmatic presupposition (participants' dispositions follow from their actions) that defines a distinctly ritual mode of participation. To see how this might be the case, however, requires saying something about media and mediatization.

Media and Mediatization

"We use 'mediatization', says Grimes, to denote the process that includes both construction and receiving communications by way of a medium," the latter being "any means of communication that, metaphorically speaking, sits in the middling position thereby linking two parties." At different points in this volume, the contributors grapple with the question "What are media?" As the above quotation suggests, the answer is, potentially, just about anything, including conflict and ritual activity itself. However, as Grimes and others make clear, the type of media that many of the authors are concerned with is what is often called "mass-media," addressed to a public audience: press, radio, television, Internet. Written, auditory or visual representations communicated by mass-media, by virtue of the distancing, technical processes that govern their production and because of the supposed anonymity of those to whom they are addressed, acquire a degree of autonomy with respect to senders and receivers. Such representations are capable of marshalling attention, inducing reactions, and being exploited in their own right. "Mediatization," denoting the construction, reception, and utilization of widely accessible depersonalized representations, thus goes far beyond the idea of information conveyed by a particular means. Rather, it is cultural process geared to the production of and response to conventional, exemplary narratives, images, and sounds that do

not so much portray the way things are as they propose how things are supposed (in both senses) to be, untainted by the entanglements and irrepressible contingencies of personal relationships.[12]

Mediatization, as the creation and communication of such representative representations, is an increasingly banal feature of our contemporary social life. "For most people," say the authors of chapter 4, "their perception of the world is media-based; their reality is media-fed." It should thus come as no surprise that, as they go on to stress, "media representation [is] a powerful factor in identity-making," and that, in general, people make privileged use of mediatized representations as benchmark references for their feelings, convictions and behaviour. Indeed, much of the time, most of us, consciously or not, are caught up in Alan Klima's far-reaching question that recalls the culture/nature perplexity (how can humans be part of nature and stand apart from it?) that Lévi-Strauss took to be the grain of sand around which the pearls of culture are formed: "How could the media be divested of 'real life,' when the media is, to some extent, our life?".[13] A case in point is provided by Grimes' discussion of "iconic" photographs such as those selected by World Press Photo: "An icon is any image that embodies itself in viewers with sufficient power that the viewers then echo, if not reproduce it." Grimes' use of the liturgically resonant term "icon" is no accident, and I would like to follow up on his observation that "ritual and media are not necessarily two separate things" by stressing how often mediatized products provide the basis for ritual enactments of the type described in the previous section. A number of cases analysed by the contributors can be seen as self-affecting performances founded upon the emulation of mediatized representations exemplifying what are taken to be axiomatic attitudes, feelings and beliefs.

In the perspective that I am proposing, the reflexive nature of many mediatized artefacts and entities, the fact that their ostensibly contrived nature encourages us to perceive ourselves perceiving them, in no way detracts from their aptitude to act as paradigmatic references for the organization of ritual events. On the contrary, this quality is consistent with what I have argued to be an essential feature of identity-refracting ritual: the unresolved tension between the participants as the extraordinary effecting parties and as those personally affected by the performances they undertake. This tension is the source of indeterminacy that sets such enactments apart from everyday intercourse and allows the participants to experience themselves as more than what they seem. The process becomes more circular and indeterminate when the mediatized representations concerned are, in part, of the participants' own making. There are a number of examples of this dynamic in the present volume. In such cases, the ritual performances in question follow from the reflexive emulation of archetypal others that are none other than the participants' mediatized selves. Ritualization is made to exploit the process of mediatization "by which the self recognizes itself by returning to itself, renewed and once removed"[14]

I have divided the papers and the eighteen case studies they present into two groups, each implying a fairly different type of relationship between ritual and media. In the first group, ritual practices are seen as having been transferred to new, mass-mediatized performative contexts. In the second, they are shown to interact with mass-media in a variety of ways.

Transfers

In many of the examples analysed in this collection, ritual enactments or features pertaining to such enactments are drawn from their original, face-to-face context to be used in the creation of new types of performances involving the use of new media or contexts of communication.

However, we need to distinguish between two quite different sorts of transfers. The one translates the enactments in question from one mode of participation to another, thereby giving rise to performative events whose purported effectiveness is altered accordingly. The other transposes ceremonial enactments to new, more widely accessible, video or on-line virtual environments.

The first, inter-modal type of transfer is illustrated by the case studies presented by the authors of chapter 2. In them, minority group representatives assert both their cultural specificity and their collective autonomy by portraying, as artistic spectacles, components drawn from ritual enactments that the surrounding, dominant populations attribute to them. In Christian Thompson's commissioned piece *I Need You / You Need Me (The Fox)*, in Garo students' Wangala dancing during the televised annual Indian Republic Day parade, and in the young people's staged performance of Burhdeva at a yearly national heritage festival, mediatization plays a peripheral role, acting either as a neutral medium of expression (*The Fox*) and/or ensuring a widespread diffusion of the events. What is at stake is the potentially problematic transfer of elements from enactments undertaken as ritual to performances founded upon another mode of participation entirely, art or spectacle. Unlike Australian Aboriginal initiation rites, Wangala dancing in village-level harvest celebrations and the presentations that punctuate pilgrimages of the Jakh and Chandikah deities, the distinctive effectiveness of these exhibited events is assumed to reside less in the impact they may have on the feelings and beliefs of those who undertake them, than in how they may affect the feelings and beliefs of others, namely those who visit the Centre for Contemporary Photography's Black on White photomedia exhibition, those who attend to Republic Day festivities, and those who take part in the Virasat national heritage festival.

In these cases, features of ritual performances are used to create what are consensually treated as artistic ones. Conflict occurs when a ritual mode of engagement is nevertheless entertained by some of the participating parties. It is clearly as a publicly mediatized symbol, and not as a ritual enactment, that students undertake Wangala dancing to showcase "Garo culture" in the Republic Day children's pageant. Because the non-Christian, poor village communities who still practice Wangala as ritual and the Christian, urban elite who perform it as spectacle do not overlap (Christians don't participate in village harvest ceremonies), there is little ambiguity and, consequently, little conflict. However, the potential for such conflict, as well as the pre-eminence accorded to ritual Wangala is given conventional expression in pan-regional Wangala competitions which the villagers always win.

The Burhdeva case is less straightforward. When undertaken to honour local deities, this event's undeniable theatrical qualities are subordinated to its supposedly ritual character. Night-long performances, entailing stringent sexual and caste-based divisions, need to take place whether there is an audience or not. However, when staged by mixed-caste young people of both sexes as an artistic display promoting their regional cultural heritage, this ritual dimension all but disappears. Conflict arose when some of these young people, to their teacher's alarm, began participating in the Burhdeva play as ritual by drawing attention to how they themselves were affected by their performance. It is important to emphasize that this short-lived bid for ritual (re)creation, in which the actors became the mouth-pieces for gods demanding the exclusion of low-caste dancers, was not a return to usual Burhdeva practice, but a novel synthesis, combining the disparaging remarks the deities traditionally address to their villagers, the young people's dissatisfaction with their well-meaning teachers, and the latter's determination to distinguish themselves from customary Burhdeva practitioners.

The Fox juxtaposes elements drawn from Australian Aboriginal ceremonial and from recent developments in contemporary indigenous art to make an aesthetic statement from the artist's perspective as both an Australian of European descent and as a member of an Australian Aboriginal community. Thompson describes his installation, which portrays a man

being symbolically transformed into a non-indigenous animal, as a contemporary re-enactment of a bygone initiation rite. In doing so, he comes up against the perceptions of others who, although excluded from such rites, have very different ideas about what they should be. Conflict is grounded in the artfully maintained tension between the explicitly fanciful content of the work (involving pink lederhosen, stylish pointy-tipped shoes, a long-nosed "neutral" mask, wide suspenders, and a foxtail) and the circular yet traditionally coherent claim that it derives from ritual knowledge whose nature, for ritual reasons (as "men's business"), can not be revealed. In this way, in interesting counterpoint to the ambivalent attitude of the White Australian establishment towards Aboriginal people, Thompson, not content to both eat and have his profoundly marbled, Black-and-White cake, does his best to bed the (Australian) baker as well. The result is a highly provocative, somewhat disturbing presentation eliciting conflicting attitudes and understandings among the exhibition's visitors. And this disturbance is precisely what makes Thompson's installation a work of art and not ritual, regardless of what the artist's personal experience and knowledge might be. Art is above all presumed to induce complex emotional and intentional states in others.

Like many public events, the three artistic spectacles presented by DuBois, de Maaker, Polit, and Riphagen are capable of accommodating a ritual mode of participation on the part of at least some of their participants. This accommodation is what leads to conflict. However, I suggest that participants' aptitude to do so relies less on the presence of certain morphological features shared by ritual and spectacle (embodied enactment, spatial and temporal delimitation, formality, etc.) than on the potential these performances offer for ritual refraction, that is, the possibility of being moved by actions proceeding from the emulation of archetypal convictions and attitudes incarnated by exemplary others: Wangala dancing non Christian Garo villagers, Burhdeva performing devotees of Jakh and Chandikah, secret-keeping Aboriginal initiates. The use of audio and video media plays an important role in the creation of such depersonalized, representative entities. Thus, the development of both showcased Wangala dancing and staged Burhdeva was largely founded on the study of locally made, state-financed documentary videos, and it is no accident that the young people's renewed ritualization of Burhdeva was precipitated not by observing actual customary practices but by watching a film of such practices. Likewise, it is significant that the purported source of ritual knowledge underlying Thompson's video installation is an audio tape of his deceased Aunt Carrie.

The cases described in chapter 6 entail two types of transfer. On the one hand, familiar rituals – church services, weddings, and funerals – are transposed to the medium of the Internet in which participants interact in a digitally rendered, three-dimensional visual space by means of virtual self-representations known as avatars. On the other hand, a degree of inter-modal transference is involved as well. Because spaces such as these are often used as environments for multi-user role-playing, participation in these on-line ceremonies is as much predicated on the presuppositions of play than it is on those of ritual. This makes for a highly equivocal situation. Participating in an event as ritual means focusing one's attention on how one's behaviour may affect one's feelings and convictions. Participating in an event as play, however, means attending, as one does in everyday interaction, to how one's behaviour may be taken to express one's personal motivations and beliefs, and, at the same time, attending to how one's behaviour is constrained by what are recognized to be unusual conventions (the "rules" of play). As one might expect, doing all this at once can pose problems, and it is difficult to imagine performing a ritual properly and engaging in good play (not just following the rules) simultaneously. Some of this ambiguity can be resolved by encapsulating ritual events, assigning their performance to particular niches within the virtual environment where the suppositions of play no longer apply. However, conflicts easily arise when encapsulations

of this type are not recognized by all concerned, such that the ritual participation of some becomes undermined by the play participation of others.

The aggressive disruption by rival factions of a memorial service undertaken for a deceased team-mate in the online game World of Warcraft offers a clear example. Whereas celebrants were committed to what they anticipated, and publicly announced, to be a moving (ritual) ceremony for one well-loved, their gaming opponents saw this gathering as a golden opportunity to inflict some serious (play) damage on the enemy.

The crashing of weddings in Second Life provides another, less obvious example. Second Life is a virtual world in which participants can engage in rich social interactions just as they are presumed to do in "real life," but under out-of-the-ordinary conditions. One can choose how to appear to others, one can fly, one communicates mainly by typing, and so forth. In this respect, although Second Life is pointedly not a game, participation in it remains implicitly oriented by the pragmatic presupposition of play. Thus, elaborately orchestrated Second Life weddings, involving considerable effort and expense, invariably become the object of disturbances by outsiders. Much as in the World of Warcraft example, the intruders seem to be motivated by the idea that a play-governed environment is not a legitimate setting for serious ritual activity. These disruptive interventions, while upsetting the wedding participants', may also comfort their conviction that what they are enacting is indeed a ritual (for if it were not, why would intruders react so negatively to it?). However, they also make such performances difficult to pull off, such that persons who wish to get married in Second Life are obliged to encapsulate their ceremonial performance still further by restricting access to the wedding site to invited guests only.

The Church of Fools, a three month-long experimental on-line church constructed exclusively for religious worship and modelled on "real-life" church-going, is the most ambiguous example. Here, the premises of play were explicitly excluded. In many ways, the frequent recourse to stipulated, largely equivocal gestures (such as injunctions to "please use 'tear hair out' gesture as we think of them" or shaking hands with co-participants who are invisible to all except themselves), made these on-line services close to what many would recognize as canonical ritual behaviour. However, even here, ongoing, coordinated virtual ritual became difficult to sustain. The 3D multi-user environment itself, which many users associated with on-line role-play, led to the intrusion of numerous disruptive visitors who enthusiastically insulted parishioners, misused liturgical gestures, and engaged in parodies of worship, upsetting proceedings to the point that increasingly stringent encapsulating measures proved necessary.

Heidbrink, Miczek, and Radde-Antweiler note that in these examples, conflicts derive not from the on-line mediatization of ritual as such but from disparate definitions of the virtual space in which they take place. The implication is that ritual and play, when pursued simultaneously, are largely incompatible. This incompatibility comes out clearly, for instance, in the on-line debates that raged for three years following the funerary massacre in World of Warcraft. The solution that consists in isolating ritual within the overall context of play is possible, but, as these examples also show, poses ongoing problems. These difficulties arise because ritual, predicated as it is on a single, straightforward presupposition (attending to how the performance of actions affects the performer's dispositions), is pragmatically less complex than play, such that negotiating a move from a situation of greater to one of lesser complexity and back again is not easy. It is indeed no accident that, whereas instances of play or game embedded in or framed by ritual are commonplace (initiation rites are typical in this respect), the reverse is much harder to come by. The only example that readily comes to mind is when young people perform children's versions of adult rituals as part of (what is seen by adults as) conventional play.

One of the questions chapter 6 raises is the status of ritualizing in multi-user virtual environments. I argue that the funerals, weddings, and church services in their examples are not merely cases of play; however, nor are they merely instances of ritual. They are examples of something more subtle and less obvious, rarely found in "real life" but prevalent on-line: ritual embedded in play. I am tempted to suggest that it is not so much the recourse to the customary trappings of conventional ritual behaviour, as it is the mediatized refraction of those who participate in these activities, that contributes to making their ceremonial enactments irreducible to mere playing. Participating persons, seated at their computers, are involved in creating exemplary, virtual avatars of themselves, defined by archetypal dispositions whose emulation leads to enactments (funerals, weddings, church services, etc.) whose performance is presumed to affect not the avatars' emotions and beliefs, but those of the persons themselves. The participants, at once their avatars and themselves, are made to feel, and to be felt by others, as more than what they ordinarily are. Awareness of the ambiguities inherent in such enactments contributes to rather than detracts from their effectiveness by helping to maintain the co-presence of one's different selves. To my mind, the widespread development of ludic ritualization as a mode of participation experienced by those who pursue it as having value in its own right is a truly innovative development, the import of which has only begun to be explored. And therein lays the potential danger of encapsulation. If on-line ritual enactments are hermetically sealed off from their encompassing play context, ludic ritualizing becomes untenable. One is left with something simpler: ritual.

On-line rituals that are nothing but rituals are the subject of chapter 5. The authors are explicitly concerned with the consequences of a single type of transference: rituals relocated to cyberspace. The three examples considered are Internet sites largely devoted to Australian Aboriginal smoking ceremonies, the Website of the Marian sanctuary at Lourdes, and weblogs created by the dying and the bereaved in the Netherlands.

One of the interesting findings of this chapter is that the first two sorts of Websites don't really function well as venues for the ritual enactments they advocate. Smoking ceremonies, that consist in holding leafy branches over a fire and then over people, places, and objects to the accompaniment of words, song, or commentary, is customarily undertaken following death, during initiations, and on other ritual occasions. Smoking has gained widespread acceptance as an important public act in Australia for the inauguration of new buildings, mines, and civic events. Beyond the purifying effects these ceremonies may have, they mediate conflict-laden relations between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal Australians, allowing the former to legitimate their presence on the continent by giving recognition to the latter as first occupants of the land. The websites that display and publicize such ceremonies, most of which are run by non Aboriginal Australians to promote aspects of Aboriginal culture, also provide a variety of resources and testimonials. However they do not include the possibility of on-line ritual enactments, and according to the authors, at the present time, virtual smoking ceremonies are difficult to imagine.

The official Lourdes website is ostensibly intended for those unable to go to the shrine itself. It provides useful contact information and practical advice regarding various forms of devotion, allows on-line visitors to make a virtual tour of the shrine and access webcam images, lets them send a prayer that is burned onto a CD and placed in the Virgin's grotto, and allows them to participate in a forum where they can leave messages and respond to those left by others. The highly commercialized, tightly managed, and aseptically reconstructed nature of the physical shrine notwithstanding, this on-line experience is apparently no substitute for the acts of intimate personal communication that, in spite of the regulations that prohibit them, constitute an essential part of what going on a pilgrimage is about: looking into Mary's eyes, touching her hands and feet, hiding hand-written notes, and entering into

physical and emotional relationships with other pilgrims. In short, while virtual pilgrimages are possible, they prove to be less than satisfactory.

Death and mourning weblogs, on the other hand, are highly successful and a source of great comfort and inspiration for their creators and visitors alike. In ongoing diaries and on-line memorials addressed to a largely anonymous audience, individuals or groups present material relating to their personal experiences of illness and bereavement: reflections, photographs, videos, poems, songs, and inspirational quotations, often accompanied by commentaries explaining the special meaning these items have for the persons concerned. In keeping with the spirit displayed by the weblogs' creators, visitors provide feedback in the form of personal testimonies, condolences, comments, and advice for all to see. These sites are maintained for several years running, and the idea that weblog authors' mediatized presence might continue to exist after death is an additional source of comfort to them. Mourners often continue to address messages and petitions to the deceased, adding further entries detailing new events and phases in their lives.

Is this kind of weblogging ritual? The authors describe it as such mainly by virtue of its repetitive and symbolic character, and because managing such a site provides solace to those in distress. Moreover, while the authors stress the creative dimension of this activity in which the persons concerned exercise direct control over how they present themselves, the degree to which they do so by means of highly conventional images and texts should also be noted. However, I would consider such activities as ritual on other grounds.

In creating and contributing to weblogs, people are not expressing themselves as they would in the context of ordinary face-to-face interaction, any more than an author, for example, may be said to be simply expressing him or herself in producing a book or a song. Potentially, they are doing something quite different. As Altena, Notermans, and Widlok remark, webloggers are creating "a mediatized self-portrait," a distanced representation of themselves that is animated by their feelings about who they experience themselves "really" to be. When, in striving to live up to this exemplary self-representation, they engage in what are recognized as characteristic actions (maintaining the weblog), the performance of which is presumed to have an effect on their personal sentiments and beliefs, they are participating in ritual refraction. This ritual process pursued by weblog creators is upheld by the occasional cooperation of visitors who, in much the same way, are involved in creating and trying to live up to mediatized selves defined by what they consider exemplary qualities such as empathy, self-disclosure, and willingness to share. The personally lived-through, yet highly conventional type of emotional reverberation that this on-line dynamic sets up affords participants with a distinctive, out-of-the-ordinary experience in the light of which they are able to reassess their lives.

The study of these three types of Internet sites is framed by Altena, Notermans, and Widlok's interrogation regarding the basis of ritual effectiveness: does it depend mainly on qualities of space (as Jonathan Smith would have it) or on the entailments of embodied action (as Ronald Grimes has suggested), both of which may be missing from on-line ritualization. The answer is that it all depends. Recognizable location, bodily experience, degree of control, agency, and situated action all seem to matter. However, I would stress the importance of interactive coordination in the effectiveness of on-line ritualization. I suspect that individual-based on-line rituals, such as lighting a virtual memorial candle, digital prayer and spell-casting, or electronically mediated soothsaying, are viable forms of on-line ritual. The presence and intervention of others (deceased persons, those to whom a prayer or spell is addressed, divinatory powers) are almost entirely contained within the individual's performance itself, with the result that a close degree of continuity between on-line and off-line action (the link between my mouse-click and the candle it lights on-screen) is easy to maintain. Problems arise, however, when the synchronization of one's own behaviour with

that of independent others in the pursuit of joint enactments is required. On the one hand, when coordination requires the use of virtual representations such as avatars, the situation tends to become one not of mere ritual but of ludic ritualization. When, on the other hand, one must collaborate with autonomous others directly, the deficits of current on-line environments with respect to the bedrock qualities of effective interaction – intentionality, responsiveness, adaptation, and personalisation – become glaringly obvious. The weblog case is particularly interesting, because it makes use of a ritual process that depends not on the joint performance of stipulated actions but on the creative co-construction of refracted agencies. In this case technical shortcomings in no way detract from the effectiveness of ritual performance. On-line virtuality, rather than undermining ritual experience, provides the latter with a privileged medium.

Interactions

A number of the chapters in this volume deal not with the transfer of rituals to new media or modes of participation (spectacle, play), but with the relationship between ritual enactments and mass-mediatization. At one extreme are cases in which canonical ceremonial forms are given widespread media coverage, resulting in conflicts organized around minority/majority or local/global discriminations. At the other extreme are cases in which media and ritual are rendered interdependent to such a degree as to be practically inseparable, conflict itself becoming the object of mediatized ritualization.

The simplest types of interactions are those in which ritual, media and conflict are seen as being connected to each other by external, causal relationships. In the situations described in chapter 4 by Langer, Quartier, Simon, Snoek, and Wiegers, for example, media intervenes to publicize a secret or little-known ritual: pamphlets are distributed detailing Masonic oaths, the Muslim call to prayer (*adhān*) in European cities becomes the object of radio and television broadcasts, Alevi congregation rituals in urban settings receive widespread media coverage, and a mass-distributed documentary film is made about evangelical religious training in the United States. In each case increased exposure gives rise to controversies in which aspects of these ceremonial enactments come up against ideas and values holding sway in the larger social environment.

The interacting bodies themselves seem fairly clear-cut. The ritual character of the performances in question is unambiguous (evangelical summer camp activities, for example, include many eminently ritual acts such as, the washing of hands with “the water of the Word” or the breaking of labelled cups in the name of Jesus to “release the spirit”). While the selective and generalizing effects of mediatization are recognized and discussed by the authors, media is envisaged mainly as a means of drawing attention to and transmitting heretofore restricted information to a wider audience. Finally, the conflicts occasioned in these cases derive from perceived value differences framed by a zero-sum (I-win-you-lose) rule as, respectively, a challenge to state and church sovereignty, a bid for Islamic ascendancy, a defiance of established orthodoxy, and an attempt at political and moral subterfuge. As the authors’ suggest, the issues involved are those typical of minority-majority relations in which a local community of celebrants enters into conflict with the dominant society that encompasses them.

These cases become less simple, however, when one takes into account the fact that the ritual – media – conflict arc is circular rather than linear, with media generating conflict that brings about changes in the ritual performances themselves. In some cases, the concerned parties abandon or alter their rituals to accommodate the dominant value system, thereby gaining a measure of their prior invisibility and/or acquiring new bargaining positions. The

imprecations accompanying Masonic oaths have been for the most part dropped, and the muezzin's call has been either eliminated or made more discrete. In other cases, changes are introduced that make the minority group even more conspicuous. Intensely mediatized evangelical campaigns have become commonplace in ever wider arenas of American life, and increasingly public Alevi ceremonial has blossomed over the last two decades as a means both for advancing political agendas and for reconfiguring and consolidating Alevi identity.

In the case of Alevis and perhaps American Evangelicals as well, something noteworthy has happened. Mass-media images of ritual enactments on television or on Internet sites such as Youtube have become a privileged reference for the determination of proper ritual form. This is especially true of recently established Alevi commemoration rituals entailing protest marches and ceremonies at martyrs' graves, enactments that, according to the authors, "derived their standardized elements and general layout largely from mediatized sources." Within the context of such self-referential circuits in which ritual behaviour is modelled on its own mediatized representation, media becomes an intrinsic feature of ritual practice. It intervenes less as a means of conveying information than as a source of inspiration, providing celebrants with depersonalized, archetypal ritualists held to embody the feelings and motivations to which they aspire. In this way, the very nature of the ceremonies undertaken is transformed. They become increasingly dominated by a process of ritual refraction in which practitioners' affecting performances are predicated on exemplary images and narrations of their own making.

The situations described in chapters 4 and 3, while taking place on different scales, are roughly analogous. Whereas the former pertain to a majority population's adverse reception of minority groups' rituals, the latter are concerned with local ceremonial initiatives and global-wide reactions to the "deviant" messages they imply.

In one case from chapter 3, largely through the personal initiatives of the revolutionary leader Francis Ona, rituals centred on the Virgin Mary, or "Mama Maria," as she is called locally, became an intrinsic aspect of Bougainville Island's bid for independence from Papua New Guinea. Collective prayer, propitiatory rites, pilgrimages and the use of statues and rosary beads, transformed a secessionist movement into a holy war and played a major role in the resolution of the conflict. Media coverage of these practices, however, sparked considerable protest both at the local level by church groups and globally by those who objected to the way the Virgin Mary had been made into an object of worship and exploited by the Bougainville Revolutionary Army to legitimate violent action.

In the other case, Graziano Cecchini, a Roman artist-activist, dissatisfied with the city's cultural politics and with the exorbitant amount of money spent on a "lacklustre" film festival, poured blood-red dye into the waters of Rome's "hallowed" Trevi fountain. The extensive mediatization of this "counter-ritualistic" act of protest, which at once revived and challenged the fountain's traditional symbolic associations (the founding of Rome, Anita Ekberg's cinematographic frolicking, visitors tossing coins into the waters for good luck), raised wide-scale controversy. While most decried the performance as sacrilegious and potentially harmful, others applauded the "rediscovery" of Rome that it occasioned.

In the two examples presented by Hermkens and Venbrux, ritual, media, and conflict are integrated into tighter, more complex relationships than in most of the other cases. On the one hand, they are explicitly framed in terms of prior local conflicts from which the controversial ritual enactments arose, such that these small-scale disputes, along with the ritual enactments in question, are seen to be projected onto a global arena, prompting people from all over the world to position themselves negatively or positively with regard to the issues they raised. On the other hand, mediatization is shown to intervene both upstream and downstream with respect to the ritual events under consideration. Because these performances make use of "global icons," the Virgin Mary and the Trevi fountain, they become the object

of the world-wide media coverage. The circular relationship implied between local and global levels goes both ways. The ceremonial appropriation of what the authors call "global ritual imagery" allows local conflicts to acquire the status of global events. At the same time, the ongoing relevance of such global ritual imagery is corroborated by its use in rituals undertaken in response to local conflicts that become the object of widespread mediatization. The ritualization of mediatized representations (the Virgin Mary and Trevi fountain) and the mediatization of such ritual practices (the Bougainville Revolutionary Army's Marian devotions, Graziano Cecchini's iconoclastic dye-pouring) go hand in hand, forming self-reinforcing circuits of meaning and action in which individual initiatives, conventional enactments, and collectively held ideas and values become the interdependent aspects of new, dynamic totalities. This is the way cultural traditions are begotten and sustained.

Consider one of the case studies in chapter 7. In September 2007, in spite of an impressive accumulation of auspicious omens (the appearance of white elephants and the discovery of large boulders of white jade whereby Buddhas "make themselves known") extensively mediatized by the Burmese Junta to legitimate their regime, the conservative order (*sangha*) of Buddhist monks, accompanied by lay persons, engaged in a ceremonial protest by undertaking the ritual called *pattam nikujjana kamma*. Parading in the streets with their alms bowls inverted, they indicated their unwillingness to accept gifts from the government, thereby displaying their refusal to give spiritual and moral recognition to the ruling Junta. Young men undertook similar counter-ritual practices by baring their chests and inviting armed soldiers to shoot, thereby threatening the latter with the possibility of engendering vengeful spirits (*nats*) such as those of persons killed by unjust rulers. This event brought about an escalating, violent national crisis, whose images were aired extensively over Western media channels until the regime closed down the Internet and stopped news transmissions, effectively shutting out the rest of the world.

In this case, as in the Bougainville and Trevi examples, rituals undertaken in response to a local conflict were given considerable global media coverage which led to international expressions of support in favour of the protesters. However, unlike these examples, and closer to those described by in chapter 4, the ritual enactments in question were entirely grounded in local religious practice. What is striking in this instance is the degree to which recursive circuits linking local and global levels and upheld by the interrelationship of ritualization and mediatization did *not* occur. As one might imagine, the absence of such circuits was due not only to the fact that the ritual events took place within the context of a local conflict whose media coverage was interrupted, but perhaps especially because only "local ritual imagery" (that is, of a type unfamiliar to Western viewers) was employed. In this respect, the Burmese case stands in stark contrast with another, well-known, extensively mediatized, "local" ritual event undertaken in a distant land in response to what was perceived as a global conflict making use of a global icon: the Afghanistan Taliban regime's destruction in 2001 of a UNESCO World Heritage Site, the twin Bamiyan Buddha statues (Fig. 9.1).

Figure 9.1 The taller Buddha of Bamiyan, UNESCO World Heritage site, before (left picture) and after destruction (right) by the Afghanistan Taliban regime.[15]

Chapter 7's other case study concerns the pulling down of Sadam Hussein's statue on Firdos Square in Baghdad. Here, globally dominant parties, especially the United States, are directly implicated, and ritual practice and media production are interrelated to such a degree as to be almost indistinguishable. De Haes, Hüsken, and van der Velde's detailed analysis shows how what was seen by many, especially American television viewers, as a highly emblematic ritual event, was largely constructed as such after the fact through the intensive use of media representations and techniques such as image selection and framing, commentary, and side-barring. Mediatization, in the hands of experts, transformed an off-the-cuff, partially fumbled attempt by the U.S. military to grandstand a handful of locals engaged in throwing shoes at the statue and attempting to smash its concrete base, into an inspiring ceremonial performance in which the polarisation of good and evil and the ascendancy of the former over the latter were dramatically "revealed" for all the world to see.

If ritual is understood in a canonical fashion, as the self-affecting performance of what are taken to be archetypal actions, it is plainly abusive to qualify the statue-toppling event, as it occurred, as ritual. Indeed, the only ritual act that actually took place was the Iraqi shoe-throwing. On the other hand, to characterize the media presentation of this event as

ritualization means either reducing the latter to a series of recurrent morphological features (repetition, formality and so forth), or buying into the ritual-as-polarisation thesis proposed by Philip Smith. This is close to the position taken by the authors whose analysis aims to expose the procedures whereby truth is systematically distorted and reconfigured so as to marshal public support for American interference overseas. Such an interpretation, however, does insufficient justice to the subtleties of human agency, at least insofar as the news-makers and their audiences are concerned. Whereas the former are made to appear as blatant manipulators, the latter are made to appear as mindless sheep.

To the extent that ritual is also understood as subject-refracting enactments proceeding from the emulation of archetypal dispositions, a somewhat different picture emerges. From this point of view, images and narrations pertaining to the event as it occurred acquire value not as facts to be accurately conveyed, but as resources for the creative construction of distanced, mediatized figures incarnating exemplary sentiments and convictions whose emulation provides the basis for self-affecting actions. In this light, it is not the soldiers but the news-makers who are engaged in ritual performance. Taking on the sentiments and convictions attributed to distanced, mediatized figures partially of their own making (oppressed Iraqis, liberating soldiers), leads them to embark on conventionalized activities (those of televised media production), the pursuit of which impacts their own feelings and beliefs. News-makers' undertakings, as actions designed to affect others, are clearly instances of ideologically motivated spectacle. At the same time, however, to the extent that the news-makers themselves may be thought to be personally moved by what they present, their performance acquires a ritual quality which is *also* appreciated by the viewing audience. In the same way that the allure of participating in on-line ceremonies derives from the fact that they are not instances of mere ritual but of ritual embedded in play, the attraction (one is tempted to say the enchantment) of watching televised news reports stems from the fact that the latter are not instances of mere spectacle but of ritualized spectacle. It is as the vehicles of such complex performances that, as the authors state, "iconic images [in news broadcasts] achieve a social status beyond their mere visual representation of fact." From this standpoint, the relationship between news-makers and news-viewers is not unlike that between weblog creators and their visitors.

Binder, Driver, and Stephenson's contribution, the last of the volume, deals with political torture, and specifically, with the violent, abusive practices perpetrated by the American military at the prisons of Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay. Their thesis is that "Torture is not simply violence but violence that is ritualized." By this they mean that while the practice of torture is not culturally understood as "ritual" and for this reason is not ritual *per se*, it is "similar to ritual proper or the same as ritual in some respects." Treating torture as a ritualized activity, also akin in many regards to theatre or to a deadly game, allows them to better foreground its all too often overlooked performative, communicative and symbolic entailments. Torture, they convincingly show, is above all a violent, unlawful bid for political hegemony, a terrifying demonstration of power for its own sake, played out not only in the shadowy confines of torture chambers, but also addressed to wider audiences as a means of inculcating submission to authority. While the existence of abuse at Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay, for example, is made known, the exact details and circumstances these brutalities remain shrouded in mystery. Relayed by the mass-media as an open secret, increasingly picked up as a theme in fictional works, torture is implanted in the public's imagination as a regrettable, yet acceptable, necessity whose undertaking is delegated to law-defying, quasi-heroic state representatives whose infamous behaviour – unavoidable drudgery laced with the exhilaration that comes from total domination – can be at once acknowledged and ignored. In this way, the systematic infliction of pain and humiliation upon others contributes to the construction of state power in several ways: by spreading fear among those

who might oppose it, by providing the unavowable grounds for a secret solidarity among its immediate practitioners, and by making tacit accomplices of a general public willing to accept the legitimacy of a government whose authority resides in its capacity to act beyond the law.

The authors argue that torture is of little practical utility as a means of exacting valid information. Indeed, one of the hallmarks of modern torture is the extent to which the abusive practices it entails exceed the limits of fruitful interrogation. Victims are punished less for what they know than for who they are. This is so because torture's main purpose lies elsewhere, as a demonstration of the state's absolute ascendancy over the minds and bodies of its supposed adversaries. Such a display of power by the state's representatives strikes fear in the hearts of its actual or potential enemies, and attests to the state's ability to act on the behalf of its citizens. At the same time, however, the brutal ferocity and the absurdly tilted playing field of torture, the lack of empathy of those who inflict or condone it, and the abject suffering and depersonalisation of its victims, constitute torture as an inhuman, transgressive act lying beyond the bounds of accepted social norms. As such, the practice of torture cannot but call into question the legitimacy of the government forces involved. This is the case not only from the "enemy's" perspective, but also, more significantly, from the point of view of the citizens of the torture-practicing regime itself, especially when it lays claim to democratic, humanitarian ideals. In short, while providing incontrovertible evidence of state power, torture may also act to undermine state authority. In this respect, political torture is highly ambiguous. In order to be effective as a basis for affirmations of political hegemony, it requires special treatment in which it is both exhibited and obscured.

In pre-revolutionary France, as elsewhere in Europe at the time, this special treatment consisted in spectacular public exhibitions of legally imposed suffering: exposure, whipping, branding, scorching, amputating of parts of the body, dragging the body, drowning in a barrel, garrotting, hanging, breaking on the wheel.[16] I have argued elsewhere that such relentlessly excessive, exaggeratedly elaborate inflictions of pain involved members of the onlooking public, less outside observers than full-fledged participants, in a network of contradictory relationships whereby their position with respect to those in power was ritually defined.[17] The greater the suffering imposed by the authorities, the greater the demonstration of the power the authorities represent, and the wider the disparity between these authorities and the condemned individual. At the same time, the more ferocious the punishment, the more the public at once detached itself from the suffering person to join forces with the authorities and dissociated itself from the punitive authorities to ally itself with the condemned person. In this way, a complex ritual relationship was constructed with respect to the powers-that-be in which citizens fully identified themselves with neither the people suffering nor those who caused them to suffer, but, on the rebound as it were, with both at the same time. The strange emotional mixture the spectators displayed on such occasions – at once intimidated and uninhibited, horrified yet strangely thrilled, at times urging the executioner on and at others rising up in revolt against him, alternately cheering at each new atrocity and moved to tears – can be understood as the emotional correlate of their paradoxical and inherently unstable position as defined by this ceremonial performance. These were ritual events in the usual sense of the term, in which the participating public were caught up in stipulated, exceptional enactments defying ordinary intelligibility and yet impacting on their personal feelings and beliefs.

Political torture, when undertaken by contemporary, democratic regimes such as in the cases of the Abu Ghraib and Guantanamo Bay prisons, also requires special treatment whereby it can become, as Binder, Driver, and Stephenson suggest, both visible and invisible. It too may become the object of ritualization, not in the analogical sense that the authors give to this term (as being *like* ritual in certain ways) but as a performance founded on ritual refraction.

As the authors remark, one of the salient features of contemporary political torture is the importance of the camera, both as a means of reinforcing the victim's humiliation and as an instrument for the objectification of state power. The images leaked to the media from Abu Ghraib are striking in at least two respects. First, they were clearly taken by the torturers for their own, collective gratification as they performed for an audience that was none other than themselves. Second, they are highly stylized, almost burlesque, portraying torture in a way that verges on theatrical performance and brings various religious, artistic, and pornographic associations to mind. While attesting to the reality of the abusive, depersonalizing treatment to which the prisoners were subjected, these images are at the same time dramatically over-staged. They contrast sharply, for example, with the quiet, anonymous horror recorded in the Wikipedia photograph of detainees upon their arrival at Guantanamo Bay's Camp X-ray (Fig. 9.2).

Figure 9.2 Detainees at Guantanamo Bay's Camp X-ray.[18]

The Abu Ghraib pictures were produced as “iconic” images by and for the prison guards themselves, and their value resides not in their ability to depict torture as it is, but in their capacity to capture certain exemplary qualities to which these soldiers-cum-torturers may be thought to aspire. The photographs are distanced representations incarnating qualities they feel they need to embody: brutal yet fun-loving, heartless yet sexy, far from home yet regular folk, fiercely loyal to America yet not naive. To the extent that the prison guards drew on these mediatized selves to engage in further staged and photographed performances presumed to impact on the way they think and feel, these images may be seen as the artefacts of a process of ritual refraction. Split between the exemplary personae they seek to emulate and their identities as individuals affected by the enactments occasioned by this emulation, the torturing soldiers are made to become, for a time, more than what they ordinarily are. It is perhaps regrettable, yet hardly surprising, that it was these mediatized, ritual representations of torture, rather than the actual practice of torture itself, which became the privileged basis for the American public’s perception of Abu Ghraib. Shocked to recognize themselves in appalling images, partly of their own making, they could at the same time take comfort in the exceptional, outlandish, symbolic nature of the persons and enactments the photos portray.

Often the way of research in the social sciences is to proceed less by validating and applying general principles to empirical situations than by using empirical material to burst out of conceptual conventions in the hope of stumbling upon other ways of thinking. This is what the contributors themselves have done with respect to some of their own original hypotheses. While apologizing for any distortions I may have introduced in responding to their papers, I am grateful having had the opportunity to do a bit of bursting out of my own. In proposing notions such as ritual refraction, archetypal dispositions, the emulation of mediatized others and selves, I am led to a single conjecture of my own: As ritual performances becomes increasingly dominated by processes of identity-refraction in which mediatized representations play a central role, we should expect an accentuation of conflict and its characteristic tendency towards polarisation.

The upside-down perspective on ritual and ritualization that I have tried to outline and apply to the material in this collection is, of course, not without problems. One of them, for example, concerns the limits of refracting ritual: Where does it end? Should we consider reality TV, self-help workshops, Internet weblogging, and other familiar features of current Euro-American life to be instances of this type of ritualization? I have no ready answer to this question. However, recalling the often encountered assertion that “traditional” societies are imbued with ritual, I wonder if, in changing our perspective, we might discover that the same holds true for “contemporary” Western culture. Imagine: a ritual-filled society of our very own.

1. Notes

1. Jonathan Z. Smith, *To Take Place* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,1987),103.
2 See, for example, Michael Houseman, "Vers un modèle anthropologique de la pratique psychothérapeutique", *Thérapie familiale* 24, no. 3 (2003): 289-312.
3. Don Handelman, *Models and Mirrors: Towards an Anthropology of Public Events* (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 1998).
4. Michael Houseman and Carlo Severi, *Naven or the Other Self: A Relational Approach to Ritual Action* (Numen Books. Leiden: Brill, 1998). Michael Houseman, "Relationality," in *Theorizing Rituals. Issues, Topics, Approaches, Concepts*, edited by Jens Kreinath, Jan Snoek and Michael Stausberg, (Leiden: Brill, 2006), 413-428.
5. Michael Houseman, "Menstrual Slaps and First Blood Celebrations: Inference, Simulation and the Learning of Ritual," in *Learning Religion: Anthropological Approaches*., edited by D. Berliner and R. Sarró (Oxford and New York: Berghahn Books, 2007), 31-48. Michael Houseman,"Des rituels contemporains de première menstruation," *Ethnologie française* 40, no. 1 (2010): 57-66.
6. Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism. Ritual, Gender and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* (London/New York, Routledge, 2002), 236.
[7] Jone Salomonsen, *Enchanted Feminism. Ritual, Gender and Divinity among the Reclaiming Witches of San Francisco* , 236.
8. Loring M. Danforth, *Firewalking and Religious Healing: The Anastenaria of Greece and the American Firewalking Movement* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 237.
9. Caroline Humphrey and James Laidlaw, *The Archetypal Actions of Ritual: A Theory of Ritual Illustrated by the Jain Rite of Worship* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1994).
10. Sarah M. Pike, *New Age and Neopagan Religions in America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 4-9.
11.Refracting ritual of this type has obvious congruencies with a number of aspects of contemporary Anglo-American culture, and I have yet to find a full-blown example it in non Western traditions. However, this does not, in itself, invalidate treating it as ritual, any more than the fact that elaborate sub-section marriage systems do not exist outside of Aboriginal Australia automatically makes them any less instances of kinship.
12. Marika Moisseeff, "Qu'en est-il du lien entre mythe et fiction: Réflexions à partir de l'ethnographie des Aranda (Aborigènes australiens)," Paper presented at the CRAL conference, "The Concept of Fiction: Towards an Epistimelogical Break," June 15, 2007, Paris.
[13]. Hermkens and Venbrux, in chapter three, quoting Klima.
[14]. Hermkens and Venbrux, in chapter three, quoting Mazzarella.
15. Taller Bamiyan Buddha statue, http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Taller_Buddha_of_Bamiyan_before_and_after_destruction.jpg.
16. Michel Foucault, *Surveiller et punir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975).
17. Michael Houseman "Quelques configurations relationnelles de la douleur", In *De la violence II*, edited by Françoise Héritier, 77-112, (Paris: Odile Jacob, 1999).
18. Detainees at Guantanamo Bay's Camp X-ray, http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:Camp_x-ray_detainees.jpg.

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